ForeWord Reviews

LITERARY COLLECTIONS

The Connoisseur's Guide to Sushi: Everything You Need to Know about Sushi Varieties and Accompaniments Etiquette and Dining Tips and More

Dave Lowry
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The vast majority of the hundreds of books about sushi available to readers in English seek to simplify the complexities of this cuisine. This author assumes that his readers are already fairly knowledgeable and are regulars at their local *sushi-ya*, or sushi restaurant. Rather than a guide for "dummies," Lowry hopes to provide "a field guide for making your way through the world of sushi and establishing yourself as a sushi snob … as a sushi *tsujin* or, in the more colloquial, a sushi *tsu*, a 'sushi connoisseur.'"

The book is divided into three sections. An opening overview covers the basics such as history and the various styles of sushi, including several ways of serving that diners are unlikely to find outside Japan (but a sushi *tsu* needs to know about them just in case). The closing section details "the practice" of sushi and covers condiments, serving dishes, and even the significance of traditional furnishings and decorations that one is likely to find at a *sushi-ya*.

The majority of the book, however, is an alphabetical exploration of *tane*, or toppings. It is with a thorough knowledge of *tane* that a sushi *tsu* makes his or her reputation. There are thirteen pages devoted to tuna (the apogee of sushi), going into detail on the various species, differences in the cuts, and other esoteric topics.

What separates a sushi *tsu* from a sushi "dummy" is more than a willingness to branch out beyond the California roll. It is a comprehensive awareness of the cuisine. "The sushi *tsu* orders *hirame* [flounder] only during the colder months of the year—never after February—when it has the least amount of fat," Lowry informs the reader. A sushi *tsu* can also demonstrate her knowledge and gain the respect of the *itamae* (sushi chef) by requesting items not on the menu, such as *kano-miso* (crab guts)—the less frequently these items are available in the U.S. the better, of course.

Given Lowry's goal of producing sushi snobs, his book could easily have become so pretentious as to be unreadable by anyone except, well, to be honest, snobs. But the author maintains a sense of humor throughout that thankfully cuts the pretense: "Anago [conger eel]

grow to be about three feet long, and slimier than a South Side Chicago ward boss." Another fish is described as being "about the length of a Taco Bell Burrito Supreme."

A restaurant critic for *St. Louis Magazine* and a martial arts expert who has studied in Japan, Lowry has written several books about his lifelong exploration of those arts. With *The Connoisseur's Guide to Sushi*, he has written an invaluable guide to a cuisine that is deeply ritualistic, very subtle, and highly demanding of those who would know it well.

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